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A Late Composition Dedicated to Nergal

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Abstract: This article treats a composition that was probably dedicated to Nergal, a god with a long cultic tradition in ancient Mesopotamia who was mainly related to war and death. The text was first edited by Böhl (1949; 1953: 207–216, 496–497), followed by Ebeling (1953: 116–117). Later, Seux (1976: 85–88) and Foster (2005: 708–709) translated and commented upon it. I will present a new reading of the invocation on the tablet's upper edge, which confirms that the tablet originated in Uruk during the Hellenistic period. Furthermore, I will discuss the many Neo-Babylonian and Late Babylonian grammatical elements of this composition. The high frequency of these elements, typical of the vernacular language, is unusual for a literary text and suggests that not only the *tablet*, but also the *composition* of the text stems from the first millennium BCE, and perhaps, just like the tablet, from Hellenistic Uruk. The purpose of this contribution is, therefore, to show through an analysis of this text, that the conservative and poetic literary language was reworked and adapted to the cultural situation of the late period in Mesopotamian literary production.

Keywords: Nergal, hymn, Neo-Babylonian grammar, first millennium BCE

When Böhl presented the editio princeps of the hymn discussed below in 1949, he called attention to a number of 'aberrant' forms ("Verwilderung der Kasusendungen") that are peculiar to the "Spätzeit", alongside "hymnisch-epische[r] Dialektform[en]".[1] A new reading of the invocational formula preserved on the upper edge of the tablet suggests that the date of the text, or more precisely, the manuscript is indeed Hellenistic. The purpose of this article is to present a new reading of the invocational formula after a collation of the tablet, and then to treat the nature and frequency of the vernacular features that are uncommon even by the standards of literary Akkadian of the Late Period.[2] Finally, I will discuss the dating and the provenience of the text in light of the new reading of the invocation and of the linguistic features. This evidence will prove a late dating of the manuscript (Hellenistic) and its provenience from Uruk, but it will also support the hypothesis that the composition itself stem from the first millennium BCE.

1 The Tablet and the Text

The cuneiform tablet LB 3272 (**Fig. 1**) belongs to the *De Liagre Böhl Collection* of *The Netherlands Institute for the Near East* (NINO), its exact provenience is unknown. A diagonal split runs from the upper left side to the lower left side of the tablet. The end of the composition is unfortunately lost, as well as the beginning of all the seventeen lines, which are, however, luckily well readable.

The severely damaged reverse side bears no signs or traces of text. The cuneiform signs are small, well-proportioned and regular. Due to a lack of space in line 7, the scribe moved the last word of the sentence (*pa-aš$_2$-qa*) to the next line; he indicated this displacement by using a slash-like sign.

1 Böhl (1949: 167–168). See Hess (2010) for a discussion on the "Hymnic-Epic Dialect."

2 In this article I use the terms Neo-Babylonian (1000 – 627 BCE) and Late Babylonian (626 BCE-end of cuneiform documentation) as introduced by von Soden (1952: 3) to refer to the late stages of the Akkadian language. However, grammatical and linguistic differences between these two periods are not sharply recognisable, so that these two conventional terms mostly relate to the political situation of the time rather than to two different linguistic realities (Streck 2011: 183; Hackl 2018: 210–211).

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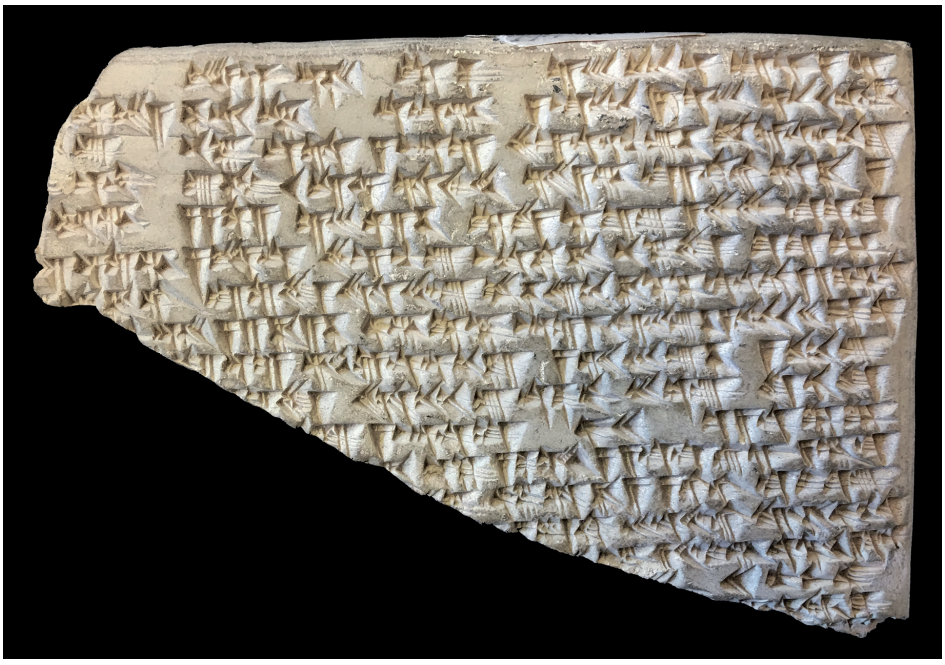

Fig. 1.: Bildunterschrift: LB 3272 (Photo by author reproduced with the kind permission of NINO).

1.1 Transliteration[3]

Upper Edge

0. [*ina a-mat*] ˹^{d}60 *u An-tu*$_4$ *liš-lim*˺

Obverse

1. [^{d}U.GUR^{4}] *qar-rad* DINGIR^{meš} *ra-aš*$_2$ *e-mu-qu-an ṣi-rat ša*$_2$ ^{d}60
2. [PIRIG] KA.DU$_8$.A *kat-ti-il na-ad-ri ša*$_2$ *ina šu-qu ša*$_2$*-ma-mu e-tel-liš* GUB-*az*
3. [*le-qu*]*-u*$_2$ *be-lu-ut-ta ša*$_2$ *ina* AN-*e bu-un-na-an-nu-u*$_2$*-šu*$_2$ *it-tan-na-an-bi-ṭu*
4. [*na-aš*] ^{giš}PAN *u-ṣu u iš-pat ta-mi-iḫ nam-ṣa-ri la a-di-ir ta-ḫa-za*
5. [*a-lik*] *maḫ-ri ša*$_2$ *ša*$_2$*-qa-a e-mu-qa-a-šu*$_2$ *ra-kib si-su-u*$_2$ *a-bu-bu la ma-ḫar*
6. [*i-lit-ti*] ^{d}60 *šur-ru-ḫu ša*$_2$ *qar-na bu-un-nu-u*$_2$ *ina te-di-iq be-lu-tu šu-su-um*
7. [*tu-qu-u*]*n ti-iq-ni ṣi-ru-tu le-*’*-u*$_2$ *rap-šu*$_2$ *lib*$_3$*-bi ḫa-si-si la na*!(UD)*-ṭa-a a-ma-ri-iš*
8. [...] ˹x˺ DINGIR^{meš} *ša*$_2$ *a-ḫa-a-šu*$_2$ *ar-ra-ka*!(AK) *ina* AN-*e me-lam-mu-u*$_2$*-šu*$_2$ *ša*$_2$*-qu-u*$_2$ *:pa-aš*$_2$*-qa*
9. [...*kakkabu ša*$_2$ *ina*] UR$_2$ AN-*e mut-tan-na-an-bi-ṭu ša*$_2$ *zi-mu-u*$_2$*-šu*$_2$ *ša*$_2$*-qu-u*$_2$
10. [.....*be-l*]*u-tu le-qu-u*$_2$ *na-aš*$_2$ GIR$_2$ *mu-du-u*$_2$ *tu-qut-tu*
11. [.....*šit-lu*]*-ṭu ša*$_2$ *ina an-na-at lem-niš iṣ-ṣa-na-ra-ra*
12. [.....]*-ḫa* ^{giš}TUKUL NIG$_2$.GIDRU-*am ša*$_2$ *ṣa-la-la sa-rat ṣa-al-la*
13. [.....*ina qa*]*b-lu u*$_3$ *ta-ḫa-za ša*$_2$*-ni-ni la i-šu-u*$_2$
14. [.....] *ša*$_2$ UNUG^{ki} *mu-na-*’*i -ir* GAL$_5$.LA$_2$^{meš} *lem-nu-tu*$_2$

3 All the amendments proposed here are suggestions either made by previous editors of the text (except for the line on the upper edge) or are based on other hymns or *šuilla*-prayers dedicated to Nergal and on Nergal’s most common epithets in other texts (e.g., King 1896: nos. 27, 46; Tallqvist 1938).

4 Though it is of course not certain, I restored the name of the deity, Nergal, in the spelling form ^{d}U.GUR. This spelling starts to be used in the Middle-Babylonian period and it prevails in late periods. Regarding Nergal’s name, see Lambert (1973; 1990), Steinkeller (1987; 1990) and Wiggermann (1998–2011a). In texts from the slightly earlier Eanna archive the name of the god is always spelled ^{d}U.GUR (Beaulieu 2003b: 295).

15. [.....] *mu-ḫal-liq za-'i -ri na-si-ḫi za-ma-an*
16. [.....*sa-pi-i*]*n* KUR *nu-kur*$_2$*-tu*$_4$
17. [.....] *na-as-ku*

1.2 Translation

Upper Edge:
0. [By the command of] ⌈Anu and Antu may (it) be successful!⌋

Obverse
1. [Nergal], warrior of the gods, the one who possesses the supreme strength of Anu.
2. [Lion] with gaping jaws, furious beast, who stands proudly in the height of heaven.
3. [Th on]e who takes hold of rulership, whose features constantly sparkle in heaven.
4. [The one who wields] bow, arrow and quiver, the one who holds the sword, fearing no battle.
5. [The one who marches] in front, whose strength is eminent, riding a horse, an overpowering deluge.
6. [Offspring] of Anu, splendid, beautiful (are his) horns, he is made suitable of the authority garment.
7. [Adorned] with an ornament of supremacy, powerful, impossible to perceive, difficult to understand.
8. [.....] among the gods, whose arms are long, his fearsome radiance is high in heaven.
9. [...Star which] in the horizon always shines, whose glow is sublime.
10. [...the power] he holds, (he is) the one who bears the dagger, the one who knows the battle.
11. [...Domina]nt (male), always flitting evilly in battle.
12. [...] weapon and scepter, whose sleeping is a false sleep.
13. [...in comb]at and in battle he has no rival.
14. [....] of Uruk, the one who makes evil demons roar.
15. [...] who destroys the enemies, (and) wipes out the antagonist.
16. [...the one who leve]ls the hostile land.
17. [...] the fallen.

1.3 Philological commentary

The many first millennium language features will be treated separately in the paragraph 'Language' below. Therefore, this commentary is confined to other noteworthy observations.

Upper Edge

The photograph of the upper edge (**Fig. 2**) shows that the traces of the signs do not fit earlier reconstructions, neither "[enimnim-ma šu-ila] (^{d})*nergal*[-kam$_2$]" proposed by Böhl (1943: 166–167) and followed by Ebeling (1953: 116), nor "... *ḫ*]*a* (?) ^{d}*ne*$_3$-[...]" proposed by Seux (1976: 86, fn. 1). The preserved traces rather suggest that we are dealing with the known invocational formula [*ina a-mat*] ⌜^{d}60 *u An-tu*$_4$ *liš-lim*⌝ "By the command of Anu and Antu, may it (the ritual, probably) be successful", which is occasionally found on Hellenistic tablets from Uruk.[5]

5 On this invocational formula see Roth (1988) (plus paragraph 3 below) and Hunger (1968: 37–41; see e.g., numbers 87 and 95: both present the invocation *ina amat Ani u Antu lišlim*).

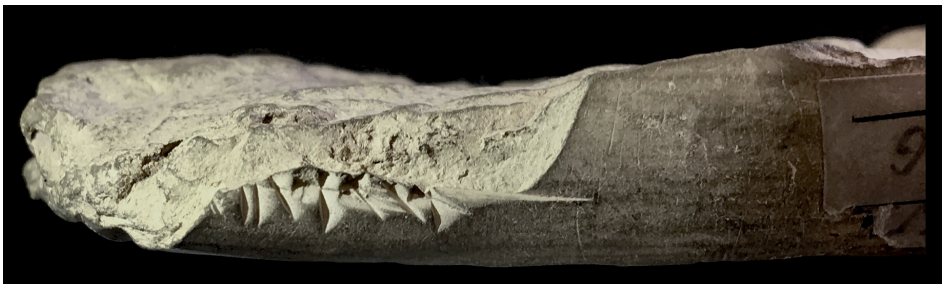

Fig. 2.: Bildunterschrift: Invocation on upper edge of LB 3272 (Photo by author reproduced with the kind permission of NINO).

Obverse
Lines 2, 3 and 8: Note that in lines 3 and 8 the scribe wrote *šamû* "heaven" with the Sumerogram AN (plus the phonetic complement), but in line 2 he used the poetic form *šamāmū*.
Line 5: *ša šaqâ emūqāšu* refers to Marduk in *Enūma Elîš* (Tablet VII 93; Kämmerer/Metzler 2012: 298f.; Lambert 2013: 128).
Line 6: If the reconstruction of *ilittu* at the beginning of the line is correct, Nergal is here presented as an offspring or progeny of Anu. This is unusual, since Nergal was considered the son of Enlil[6] as, for example, in the myth "Enlil and Ninlil" (Behrens 1978). I will come back to this phrase in paragraph 3 below.
Line 7: Here the scribe writes UD-*ṭa-a* confusing the sign UD with NA.[7] *ḫasīsi lā naṭâ amāriš pašqa* refers to Marduk in *Enūma Elîš* (Tablet I 94; Kämmerer/Metzler 2012: 133; Lambert 2013: 54).
Line 8: the sign AK stands for the sign KA. The last word of this line, *pa-aš$_2$-qa* belongs to line 7.
Line 9: *zīmu* means "appearance, look", but also "glow" when referring to stars (CAD Z: 121). Seux (1976: 87) already noticed that this line refers to Nergal's astral appearance, so the second meaning is preferable in translation since it emphasizes the radiance of the planet.
Line 11: The verb *ṣarāru* can mean "to flash" when it refers to stars and "to flit" when it refers to demons (CAD Ṣ: 106). Both meanings fit in the context of our text. I chose the second meaning because the verb refers to the warrior aspect of Nergal as the noun *anantu* indicates. This noun is a poetic word for "battle, strife" (CAD A/2: 111); here, it is used in its Standard Babylonian plural form *annātu*.
Line 12: The adjective *sarru* appears in its variant *sāru*.
Line 13: *qablu* is, just like *tāḫazu, anantu* and *tuquttu*, a word for battle/fight. The scribe seemingly tried to use as many different words for "battle" as he knew.
Line 14: the adjective *lemnu* "evil" is often used to characterize *Galla*-demons (CAD G: 19–20). The verb *naʾāru* is only attested in Standard Babylonian texts (CAD N/1: 7) and means "to roar" (said of demons and lions).
Line 15: Both *zāʾiru* and *zāmânu* mean "enemy," but the second one is again only attested in Standard and Neo-Babylonian texts (CAD Z: 34).

1.4 Language

The Neo- and Late Babylonian linguistic and orthographical features as they appear in our hymn may be explained as the results of the intrusion of the vernacular language of the period. Jursa/Debourse (2017) recently discussed similar phenomena in another composition but there the features are far less pronounced than in our text.

6 As e.g., in a Neo-Assyrian *šuilla*-prayer dedicated to Nergal found on several manuscripts (Mayer 1976: 478–481).
7 Ebeling (1953: 116); Böhl (1949: 166) reads *ud-da-a*.

1.4.1 Morphology:

a) Dropping of the final vowels: This phenomenon is a common feature of the late stages of the Babylonian language.[8] It is well attested in our hymn, see e.g., *ṣi-rat* (line 1), *kat-ti-il* (line 2), *iš-pat* (line 4), *an-na-at* (line 11), *za-ma-an* (line 15). As showed by Streck (2011: 385), the zero morpheme is mostly attested in the final stage of the language.

The phonetic complement *-az* attached to the verb GUB (corresponding to the Akkadian *uzuzzu*) at the end of the line 2 indicates the lack of the subordinative *-u* (GAG § 83g). This phenomenon – which is attested in late period everyday documents (Hackl in press) – may reflect the spoken language where it was probably not pronounced anymore (Hackl 2007: 145–146).

b) Casus declension: 'Aberrant' case endings are the result of the general dropping of final short vowels in the spoken language in the Neo- and Late Babylonian language stages.[9] In the present hymn we have attested the following deviating forms:

	-u	-e/-i	-a
Nominative		*nadri* (line 2)	*ṣalāla* (line 12) *ṣalla* (line 12)
Genitive	*šuqu* (line 2) *šamāmū* (line 2) *ūṣu* (line 4) *sīsû* (line 5) *bēlūtu* (line 6) *ṣirutu* (line 7) *tuquttu* (line 10) *qablu* (line 13) *lemnūtu* (line 14) *nukurtu* (line 16)		*tāḫaza* (line 4, 13) *qarna* (line 6) *aḫāšu* (line 8)

According to Groneberg (1987: 79), in Standard Babylonian hymns, instances of genitives ending in *-u* are attested only in a few cases, while the ending in *-a* is almost absent. Therefore, as the table above shows, the frequency of genitives in *-u* and in *-a* in our composition is striking.

1.4.2 Orthography (late periods writing and phonology conventions)[10]

Rather important for the discussion of the dating (see below), is the spelling of the name of Anu in lines 1 and 6 with the logogram 60,[11] the holy number. This orthographic convention is definitely common for the Seleuco-Parthian periods,[12] while it is uncommon before the fifth century.

The 'broken' orthography in *e-mu-qu-an* (line 1) with the *-u* before *-ān* may be explained by the fact that CV or VC signs are sometimes indifferent to the quality of the vowel (Hackl in press). In line 3, the word *bēlutta* from *bēlūtu* doubles the *-t* (GAG § 7); two consonants can represent a long vowel (Streck 2011: 384f.). Both *it-tan-an-bi-ṭu* (line 3) and *mut-tan-na-an-bi-ṭu* (line 9), from the verb *nabāṭu*, display an extra *-na-*. This may be a case of 'Komplementierung' phenomenon (Streck 2014: 248). The *iṣ-ṣa-na-ra-ra*, (line 11) from the verb *ṣarāru*, should have been written as *iṣṣanarrar*; it may display the 'überhängender Vokal' phenomenon (GAG § 18; Groneberg 1987: 143).

8 GAG § 13c; Streck (2011: 384); Hackl (in press).
9 GAG § 63e; Streck (2011: 385; 2014: 285); Hackl (in press).
10 For a discussion of the late period writing system, see Hackl (in press).
11 On number syllabaries, see Pearce (1996).
12 Beaulieu (1992: 57) and Stolper (1990: 562).

2 The Content

2.1 Hymn or Prayer?

Böhl (1943), Seux (1976) and Foster (2005) consider this text a hymn, while Ebeling (1953: 11) classifies it as "Beschwörung(en) durch Handerhebung". The distinction between hymns and *šuilla*-prayers (hand lifting prayers) is not always clearly made; it often depends on the context of the intended performance. If one takes into account only what is left on the tablet, the text should be classified as a hymn, because it lacks the petition. However, the supplicatory phrases (as well as classificatory terms) may have stood in the broken final part of the tablet.

2.2 To Nergal?

Due to the damage of the tablet, the name of the deity that normally stands in the first line of the composition is not preserved. According to their reading of the invocational formula (as discussed above), Böhl (1943: 166–167), Ebeling (1953: 116) and Seux (1976: 86, fn.1)[13] considered Nergal as the addressee of the composition. However, the new reading of the invocation (see **Fig. 2**) does not mention Nergal or another addressee at all. The absence of the name or unequivocal features of a god makes a certain identification not possible, but the content of the composition shows that a male warrior deity is undoubtedly its addressee. The warlike aspect emerges through the epithets (e.g., *qarrādu* "warrior"), the exaltation of weapons and the focus on the deity's prowess as a warrior (lines 1–5, 10–17). In line 2, the deity is compared to a lion (PIRIG KA.DU$_8$.A), an animal which often appears linked to warlike gods. The celebration of his bright position in the sky (lines 2–3, 8–9) is a reference to the astral appearance of the deity in question. The last (preserved) part of the composition relates again to the warrior side of the god.

Nergal's typical features[14] match with the features of the god praised in our hymn and support the choice of considering Nergal as the addressee of the composition.[15] The lion is linked to Nergal in the second and (mainly) in the first millennium BCE.[16] Regarding the weapons, bow, arrow, quiver (line 4) and dagger (line 10) appear as part of Nergal's warrior equipment in the composition *The Death of Ur-Namma A* (Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 117, line 88). The sword *namṣaru* (line 4) is another attribute of Nergal in iconography, in particular during the Neo-Assyrian period.[17]

Nergal's astral appearance is the planet Mars (Wiggermann 1998–2001a: 222–232). In line 12, we find the word *sarru* (mock, false, criminal), which is one of the epithets of Mars;[18] this is perhaps an implicit reference to Nergal as a planet.

Demons (line 14) are associated with Nergal from the second millennium BCE onwards just because of his intrinsic nature (Wiggermann 1998–2001a: 222): he is a god of death since he is able to cause it by using physical weapons, plagues, pestilences and demons. The presence of *Galla*-demons probably merely underlines the glorification of Nergal's destructive power.

13 Foster (2005: 708–709) considered Nergal as the addressee of the composition as well, but he does not mention the invocation formula at all.

14 For hymns dedicated to Nergal, see e.g., for Sumerian hymns Metcalf (2015: 232); for Akkadian hymns see e.g., Mayer (1976: 402–403); Seux (1976: 78–90, 312–314); Foster (2005: 707–709). There are also prayers dedicated directly to Mars (*ṣalbatānu*), see e.g., Ebeling (1953: 8–10).

15 Still, it could be possible to consider the warrior god Ninurta as the addressee of our composition – he is also related to the lion in iconography and he also has an astral appearance (Sirius) – , but the preserved part of the composition does not mention other typical features of this deity.

16 Wiggermann (1998–2001a: 218; 1998–2001b: 223–226); during the first millennium, this animal was the most widely used symbol to represent Nergal in iconography.

17 The dagger/sword represents Nergal in some Neo-Assyrian standards carried by Neo-Assyrian chariots in battle; see Dezső (2012: 57).

18 See Reynolds (1998) on names and features of Mars in Mesopotamia.

3 Dating of the text

The new reading of the invocational formula proves that the manuscript dates from the Hellenistic period[19] and that it originated in Uruk (see below). According to Roth (1988: 1) this is a "common formula [found] on scholastic and scientific texts of the late Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods, particularly from Uruk and Babylon." [20] However, the date of the tablet does not say much about the time of the drafting of the text, as Hellenistic scribes studied and copied older works of the cuneiform tradition.[21]

Böhl (1943) and Seux (1976) considered this tablet a copy of an older text and attributed the 'aberrant' grammatical features of the composition to modernizations by a later scribe. Indeed, late copies of older (perhaps second millennium BCE) texts occasionally display a number of linguistic novelties (Groneberg 1987: 79f.). Our hymn stands out for its high number of such novelties, they appear in almost every line. Other hymns and prayers known in first millennium copies are much more conservative in this respect.

Neo- and Late Babylonian private letters or administrative documents largely display these linguistic features,[22] in contrast to most first millennium literary compositions. Scribes from Hellenistic Uruk used to practice the writing of both administrative and scholarly texts; this may have led to a "transference of linguistic items peculiar to one or the other genre" (Hackl/Oelsner in press).

These many 'late' grammatical features clearly betray a first millennium composition. A terminus post quem is certainly provided by the literal quote from *Enūma Elîš* for which we have no attestation before ca. 1300 – 1100 BCE (Lambert 2013: 3–4). Foster also (2005: 708) took this quotation as evidence for "a late date of composition" of this Nergal hymn, that is, the first millennium BCE.[23]

The development of the Babylonian language over the first millennium is, of course, gradual; no exact boundaries for the appearance or disappearance of certain linguistic phenomena can be determined (Hackl in press). Therefore, the grammatical features do not help us to date the text more precisely. Yet, there are a few hints that may suggest that the composition (and not only the manuscript) was drafted by a scribe in Hellenistic Uruk. First, the allusion to *Enūma Elîš* tablet I line 94[24] – *ḫasīsi lā naṭâ amāriš pašqa* "impossible to perceive, difficult to understand" – refers to Marduk, while in our composition Nergal is the one who assumes this epithet (line 7 + the last word of line 8). As Foster (2005: 25) remarked, the attribution to Nergal makes "so little sense that one may conclude that this [*Enūma Elîš* phrase] was lifted as a memorable line from the epic and misapplied in the Nergal hymn." This is certainly true, and we may add that this kind of transfer best fits Hellenistic Uruk, where the earlier emphasis of Marduk's exalted position as head of the pantheon had ceased to make room for a more local perspective.[25] From the late Achaemenid times, at the latest at the beginning of Seleucid rule, Anu (re)claimed the position as the main city god of Uruk (Beaulieu 2018: 189). Anu is mentioned in two lines of the hymn, at the end of line 1, in which Nergal is said to possess "the supreme strength of Anu" and in line 6, in which Nergal might be called the offspring (*ilittu*) of Anu. In earlier periods Nergal was regarded as a son of Enlil (see commentary line 6). Thus, the composer of this hymn not only gave Anu "supreme strength," but also replaced Enlil by Anu with respect to Nergal's family tree. The prominent position of Anu in the composition best fits a Hellenistic Urukean context. Religious texts are

19 Unpublished material from British Museum (courtesy of C.B.F. Walker) confirms Roth's statements (1998: 3) about the first attestation of this formula in 406 BCE in Northern Babylonia. In Southern Babylonia no attestations have been found before the Hellenistic period. New material on this matter will be presented by J. Hackl elsewhere.

20 The corresponding versions from Babylon invoke Bēl and Bēltiya (Roth 1988: 2).

21 According to Pearce (1996: 462), the scribes of the Seleucid period made an effort to carry on the Babylonian literary tradition; they produced a large number of copies, but with some evidence of innovations, especially in 'scientific text'.

22 Beaulieu (2003a: 359); Streck (2011: 380); Hackl (in press). On the transference of linguistic items ("cross-genres imprints") from Standard Babylonian to Neo- (and Late) Babylonian, see Hackl (in press) and Hackl/Oelsner (in press).

23 However, he placed the hymn in the chapter "Mature Period" (1500 – 1000 BCE), possibly so that the reader can compare it to the other two (older) Nergal hymns. Böhl (1943: 168) argued that the form *amāriš* (used instead of *ana amāri*) proofs the antiquity of the text but, since it is a quote from *Enūma Elîš*, this word is certainly no proof for the (active) use of the "Hymnisch-epische Dialektform" in this composition.

24 Kämmerer/Metzler (2012: 133); Lambert (2013: 54).

25 Röllig (1991: 127–128); Linnsen (2004: 15).

generally rich in stock phrases, common epithets and standard formulas. So, the suggestion that this hymn was newly composed does not mean that the entire composition was a highly innovative and original work. The composer probably drew heavily from older sources to compile this hymn to Nergal, but he took the novel cultic circumstances of Hellenistic Uruk in consideration.

4 Provenience

Even though the official provenience of the tablet is unknown, the mention of the city of Uruk in line 14 has been taken as a hint that the tablet originated there.[26] This hypothesis is now supported by the reconstruction of the invocation on the upper edge of the tablet: "May it be successful by the command of Anu and Antu." Many texts from libraries from Hellenistic Uruk, mostly from *Bīt Rēš*, the temple of Anu, contain this formula.[27] An example is the tablet from *Bīt Rēš* that describes the ritual for the New Year celebration in Uruk.[28] Another tablet with the same formula from Seleucid Uruk (BRM 4, 7) describes the second *Akītu* festival in the month *Tašrītu*. Linssen (2012: 209) dates this tablet to 251 BCE; the colophon reports that the text is a copy of an older one.

Texts from the Eanna archives show that Nergal had his own sanctuary in Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian period. Nergal appears, for instance, among other deities in the *lubuštu*-ceremony (Linssen 2004: 52–53). The last attestation of Nergal in the Eanna archive is PTS 2180 (line 71) dated to the 29th year of Darius I.[29] KAR 32, related to the *Akītu* festival, mentions Nergal.[30]. Linssen (2004: 38) reports that Nergal is the addressee of the *pit bābi*-ceremony in Hellenistic Uruk, and he is associated with the stellar constellations of Scorpio (*Araḫsamnu*) and Gemini (*Simānu*). Moreover, in Seleucid Uruk Nergal still appears in personal names, such as *Nergal-niṣir* or *Abdi-Nergal*.[31]

5 Conclusion

This literary composition to Nergal contains an unusually high number of linguistic traits that betray a first millennium BCE origin of its composition. In particular, these traits are the dropping of the final vowel and the subsequent development of case declensions as well as other orthographic conventions. These phenomena reflect the vernacular language's features of the period, which influenced the composition of the text. The production of new religious texts is likely when political or cultic circumstances called for innovations; otherwise older texts would have continued to be used. Hellenistic Uruk is such a case when Anu rose to power and new sanctuaries were built. The fact that Anu is mentioned twice in the text, once replacing Enlil as Nergal's father, also points to a Hellenistic date. That the manuscript comes from Hellenistic Uruk is beyond doubt; the invocation is sufficient proof for that. Naturally the author, probably an Urukean priest, could tap into the traditional repertoire of Standard Babylonian literature when he drafted the Nergal hymn.

Literary creativeness is deemed to have been poor in late periods. In the words of Foster: "With the exception of a prayer for Antiochus Soter (…), no work of Akkadian literature can be identified as having been first composed in the final phase of Akkadian literature, corresponding to the Late Babylonian period of the Akkadian language, in political terms the later Persian, Hellenistic, and Parthian periods".[32] The composition

26 Böhl (1943: 167) already considered a provenience at Uruk-Warka. Foster (2005: 708) states that the text "is said to come from Uruk," but he does not discuss this further.

27 According to Neugebauer (1955: 11) all the astronomical texts from Uruk display this formula.

28 AO 6459, see Thureau-Dangin (1921: 86; 1922: 39).

29 Beaulieu (2003b: 295).

30 Linssen (2004: 201–208 in particular 201 and 204).

31 Schroeder (1916: 1194); Krul (2018: 352 and 354).

32 Foster (2007: 111); a similar statement is on the same page: "They [the Late Period scribes] may have had such a strong sense of tradition that they were not inclined to compose new works but were content to copy and study older ones."

here may suggest that we should modify this picture or at least add another work to the literary production in Akkadian during the Hellenistic period.

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